

Would Jesus Drop the Nagasaki Bomb?

The second and hopefully last nuclear bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, Japan, on Aug. 9, 1945. Among the bitter ironies of that day, the U.S. plane was flown by an all-Christian crew that picked for its target the landmark of a Christian church that had survived Japanese persecution, writes Gary G. Kohls.

By Gary G. Kohls

Sixty-eight years ago, at 11:02 a.m., Aug. 9, 1945, an all-Christian bomber crew dropped a plutonium bomb, on Nagasaki, Japan. That bomb was the second and last atomic weapon that had as its target a civilian city. Somewhat ironically, Nagasaki was the most Christian city in Japan and "ground zero" was the largest cathedral in the Far East.

These Christian airmen did their job efficiently, and they accomplished the mission with military pride. There was no way that the crew could not have known that what they were participating in met the definition of an international war crime (according to the Nuremberg Principles that were very soon to be used to justify the execution of many German Nazis).

It had been only three days since the Aug. 6 bomb, a uranium bomb, had decimated Hiroshima. The Nagasaki bomb was dropped amidst considerable chaos and confusion in Tokyo, where the fascist military government had been searching for months for a way to honorably end the war.

The only obstacle to surrender had been the Roosevelt/Truman administration's insistence on unconditional surrender, which meant that the Emperor Hirohito, whom the Japanese regarded as a deity, would be removed from his figurehead position in Japan an intolerable demand for the Japanese and one that kept Japan from surrendering months earlier.

The Russian army had declared war against Japan on Aug. 8, hoping to regain territories lost to Japan in the disastrous Russo-Japanese war 40 years earlier, and Stalin's army was advancing across Manchuria. Russia's entry into the war represented a powerful incentive for Japan to end the war quickly and they much preferred surrendering to the U.S. rather than to the Soviet Union.

A quick end to the war was important to the U.S. as well. It did not want to divide any of the spoils of war with its erstwhile Soviet allies.

The Target Committee in Washington, D.C. had made a list of relatively undamaged Japanese cities that were to be excluded from the conventional fire-bombing (using napalm) campaigns that had burned to the ground 60-plus major

Japanese cities during the first half of 1945. That list of protected cities included, at one time or another Hiroshima, Niigata, Kokura, Kyoto and Nagasaki. These relatively undamaged cities were off-limits from incendiary terror bombings but were to be preserved as possible targets for the new "gimmick" weapons of mass destruction.

Scientific curiosity was a motivation in choosing the targeted cities. The military and the scientists needed to know what would happen to intact buildings and their living inhabitants when atomic weapons were exploded overhead. Ironically, prior to Aug. 6 and 9, the residents of Hiroshima and Nagasaki considered themselves lucky for not having been bombed as much as other cities. Little did they know.

Early in the morning of Aug. 9, 1945, a B-29 Superfortress, which had been christened Bock's Car, took off from Tinian Island in the South Pacific, with the prayers and blessings of its Lutheran and Catholic chaplains. It headed for Kokura, the primary target. Bock's Car's plutonium bomb was in the bomb bay, code-named "Fat Man," after Winston Churchill.

The only field test (blasphemously code-named "Trinity") of a nuclear weapon had occurred just three weeks earlier (July 16, 1945) at Alamogordo, New Mexico. The molten lava rock that resulted from the heat of that blast (twice the temperature of the sun) can still be found at the site today. It is called trinitite.

Japan's War Council

The reality of what had happened at Hiroshima was only slowly becoming apparent to the fascist military leaders in Tokyo. It took two to three days after Hiroshima was incinerated before Japan's Supreme War Council was able to even partially comprehend what had happened there, to make rational decisions and to discuss again the possibility of surrender.

But it was already too late, because by the time the War Council was meeting that morning in Tokyo, Bock's Car and the rest of the armada of B-29s was already approaching Japan – under radio silence. The dropping of the second bomb had initially been planned for Aug. 11, but bad weather had been forecast and the mission was moved up to Aug. 9.

With instructions to drop the bomb only on visual sighting, Bock's Car arrived at the primary target, but Kokura was clouded over. So after futilely circling over the city three times, there was no break in the clouds, and, running seriously low on fuel in the process, the plane headed for its secondary target, Nagasaki.

Nagasaki is famous in the history of Japanese Christianity. Not only was it the site of the largest catholic church in the Far East, St. Mary's Cathedral (completed in 1917), but it also had the largest concentration of baptized Christians in all of Japan. It was the megachurch of its time, with 12,000 baptized members.

Nagasaki was the location where the legendary Jesuit missionary, Francis Xavier, established a mission church in 1549. The Christian community survived and prospered for several generations.

However, soon after Xavier's planting of the church in Japan, it became obvious to the Japanese rulers that Portuguese and Spanish commercial interests were exploiting Japan, and it didn't take too long for all Europeans to be expelled from the country as well as their foreign religion. All aspects of Christianity, including the new Japanese converts, became the target of brutal persecutions.

By 1600, being a Christian was a capital crime in Japan. The Japanese Christians who refused to recant of their new religion suffered torture and even crucifixions similar to the Roman persecutions in the first three centuries of Christianity. After the reign of terror was over, it appeared to all observers that Japanese Christianity was extinct.

However, 250 years later, in the 1850s, after the coercive gunboat diplomacy of Commodore Perry forced open an offshore island for American trade purposes, it was discovered that there were thousands of baptized Christians in Nagasaki, living their faith in a catacomb existence, completely unknown to the government – which immediately started another purge.

But because of international pressure, the persecutions were soon stopped, and Nagasaki Christianity came up from the underground. And by 1917, with no help from the government, the growing Japanese Christian community had built the massive Urakami Cathedral, in the Urakami River district of Nagasaki.

Now it turned out, in the mystery of good and evil, that the massive cathedral was one of two Nagasaki landmarks that the Bock's Car bombardier had been briefed on, and looking through his bomb site 31,000 feet overhead, he identified the cathedral through a break in the clouds and ordered the drop.

At 11:02 a.m., during morning mass, Nagasaki Christianity was boiled, evaporated and carbonized in a scorching, satanic, radioactive fireball that exploded 500 meters above the cathedral. As it turned out, "ground zero" for "Fat Man" was the surviving center of Japanese Christianity which had survived two centuries of persecution.

Nagasaki Christian Death Count

Since the Cathedral was the epicenter of the blast, most Nagasaki Christians did not survive. Six thousand of them died instantly, including all who were at confession that morning. Of the 12,000 church members, 8,500 died as a direct result of the bomb.

Three orders of nuns and a Christian girl's school disappeared into black smoke or chunks of charred remains. Tens of thousands of innocent Shinto and Buddhist Japanese also died instantly and hundreds of thousands were mortally wounded, some of whose progeny are still in the process of slowly dying from the trans-generational malignancies and immune deficiencies caused by the deadly plutonium.

What the Japanese Imperial government could not do in over 200 years of persecution, destroy Japanese Christianity, American Christians did in nine seconds. Even today those who are members of Christian churches in Japan represent a fraction of 1 percent of the population, and the average attendance at Christian worship services is 30. Surely the decimation of Nagasaki at the end of the war crippled what at one time was a thriving church.

The hidden history of Nagasaki Christianity and its devastation on Aug. 9, 1945, should stimulate discussion and perhaps repentance among those who profess to be followers of the nonviolent Jesus and who stay silent about or support American militarism.

Father George Zabelka, the Catholic chaplain for the 509th Composite Group (the 1,500-man Army Air Force group whose only mission was to drop the atomic bombs on their mainly civilian targets) was one of the few Christian leaders who came to recognize the contradictions between what his modern church had taught him about war and what the early church taught about violence, i.e., that violence was forbidden to those who wished to follow Jesus.

Several decades after he was discharged from the military chaplaincy, Father Zabelka finally concluded that both he and his church had made serious theological errors in religiously legitimating the organized mass slaughter that is modern air war. He came to see that the enemies of his nation were not, according to New Testament ethics, the enemies of God, but rather they were actually fellow children of a merciful God that are to be loved and not killed.

Father Zabelka's conversion away from the standardized violence-tolerant Constantinian Christianity turned his ministry around 180 degrees. His new understanding of the truth of gospel nonviolence inspired him to devote the remaining decades of his life to speaking out against violence in all its forms, especially the violence of militarism and war. On the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Nagasaki, he went to the city to tearfully ask for forgiveness for

his part in the crime.

Likewise, the Lutheran chaplain, William Downey (formerly of Hope Evangelical Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota), in his counseling of soldiers who had become troubled by their participation in making murder for the state, later denounced all killing, whether by a single bullet or by weapons of mass destruction.

A Religion That Has Blessed War

In Daniel Hallock's important book, *Hell, Healing and Resistance*, the author talks about a 1997 Buddhist retreat led by the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh that attempted to deal with the hellish post-war existence of combat-traumatized Vietnam War veterans.

Hallock wrote, "Clearly, Buddhism offers something that cannot be found in institutional Christianity. But then why should veterans (*who largely have abandoned the faiths of their childhoods*) embrace a religion that has blessed the wars that ruined their souls? It is no wonder they turn to a gentle Buddhist monk to hear what are, in large part, the truths of Christ."

As a cradle Christian who tried hard to follow the tenets of the Sermon on the Mount, I was stung by Hallock's comment, but it was the wake-up sting of a sad and sobering truth that made me try and, so far, apparently fail to raise the consciousness of professed Christians to the truth of gospel nonviolence by being part of an effort called Every Church A Peace Church.

Another motivating factor for me in alerting readers to this important censored-out history is that, as a physician who has dealt with many psychologically traumatized patients (including traumatized combat veterans), I know for certain that violence, in its myriad forms, can irretrievably bruise the human body, mind and spirit

I have learned that psychological, physical, sexual and spiritual trauma, neglect, isolation, brain-altering psychotropic drugs and brain malnutrition can cause neurological damage that can mimic any number of so-called mental illnesses. These traumas are deadly and even contagious. I have seen violence and the resultant traumatic illnesses spread through families even involving the third and fourth generations following the initial victims and perpetrators, just like the progeny of the atomic bomb victims of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the hibakusha.

The cycle of contagious illnesses will continue until the military and domestic violence that fuels America's current mental ill health epidemics is stopped. One of the most difficult "mental illnesses" to treat is combat-induced

posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In its most virulent form combat-induced PTSD may be incurable because it likely represents significant neurological/brain damage.

PTSD is also a serious spiritual problem for any church that fails to teach its young people about the gruesome realities of the satanic war zones that threaten their souls. Years ago I read a Veteran's Administration study that showed that, whereas most Vietnam War-era recruits came from churches where they actively practiced their faith, if they came home with PTSD, the percentage returning to the faith community approached zero. Daniel Hallock's premise above holds.

Therefore the church is inadvertently promoting anti-Christic homicidal violence (which contradicts gospel themes) by not teaching what Jesus taught about violence and how he lived his life. Therefore, refraining from warning their young members about combat-induced PTSD is directly undermining the "retention" portion of recruitment and retention campaigns that many churches embrace.

Hopefully this essay will promote honest discussions (at least among the followers of Jesus) about the ethics of patriotically making murder for the state. The church, of course, should reject the seemingly persuasive arguments that come from the perspective of national security agencies, the military-industrial complex or from the perspective of pre-Christian eye-for-an-eye retaliation thinking that Jesus pointedly rejected.

Rather it should be obvious that, for such discussions, the church needs to adopt the perspective of the Sermon on the Mount, the core ethical teachings of Jesus (found in Matthew 5, 6 and 7 and Luke 6).

What can be done to prevent the next Nagasaki?

The next Nagasaki can be prevented if Christian church leadership will courageously heed Jesus's call to reject violence in all its forms by learning and practicing active nonviolence, according to the strategies of Jesus, Gandhi and Martin Luther King, and by refusing to cooperate with their government's legal right to conscript their church's sons and daughters into the military and teach them, by coercive methods and psychological rape, the art of homicide that will surely poison their souls.

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